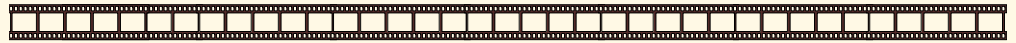


MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

# FILM AND MEDIA CULTURE

JANUARY 2024



## UPCOMING EVENTS



**Senior Project Screening**  
February 1st, 7:30pm in Dana Auditorium

**Hirschfield International Film Series**  
February 15th, 7:00pm in Dana Auditorium  
Film TBA

## WHAT'S INSIDE

Upcoming Events  
PAGE 1

Recent Events Recap  
PAGE 1

Dornaz Hajiha Visit  
PAGE 2

Interview With Dornaz Hajiha  
PAGE 3-4



## RECENT EVENTS RECAP



### Anatomy of a Fall Screening December 7

*Anatomy of a Fall* was the December Hirschfield First Thursdays film. In the film, a celebrated writer is put on trial when her husband falls to his death from their secluded chalet. The event hosted 115 community members and students!

### Bottoms Screening December 9

The Hirschfield Student Programmers organized a screening of the film *Bottoms* as a stress-buster event during finals week. In the film, two unpopular queer high school students start a fight club to have sex before graduation.



# DORNAZ HAJIHA VISIT

Filmmaker Dornaz Hajiha visited Middlebury in the second week of January. During her visit, Hajiha met with students working on senior projects, providing them with insight and tips.

On January 11, Hajiha's award-winning film, *Like a Fish on the Moon*, was screened as a part of the Hirschfield International Film Series. Community members and students gathered to watch the film, which takes place in Iran and centers around a family trying to find a remedy for their child's mutism.

Following the screening, Hajiha hosted a Q&A, to field questions about her filmmaking process and creative decisions. When asked about how she worked with the actors to move from a written screenplay to what the viewer sees on screen, Hajiha emphasized the importance of a long rehearsal period. In the making of the film, she auditioned over 800 children for the role and spent months working with her actors to the extent that the characters and actors began to blend. Hajiha also addressed the ending of her film in the Q&A, which audience members felt left the story unresolved, given the boy still does not speak. Hajiha shared that she believes that the film is reflective of real life in this way and explores the idea of normalcy. "I think most of our questions in life are left unresolved or we assume that we are finding an answer...In some things, there is no solution. What else can they do apart from accepting it?" Hajiha explained.

*Photos, top to bottom: Dornaz Hajiha answers questions after a screening of "Like a Fish on the Moon;" Hajiha meets with a student on a senior project set; Hajiha answers questions after a screening of "Like a Fish on the Moon;" Hajiha meets with a student to discuss senior work.*



### What got you interested in film?

Since I was a little kid, I was very obsessed with painting, drawing, and making things, and while I was growing up, I was kind of trying different media. I even tried a little bit of sculpture and I studied fine art, but still, it wasn't enough for me and I wanted to show more, I wanted to tell more. So of course the last thing you would try would be cinema because it kind of has all of the arts in it, as we call it the seventh art. We can use the visuals, the sound, the music, the storytelling, and especially working with live material like working with actors instead of colors only adds a lot to the art piece.

interview with

# DORNAZ HAJIHA



### What advice would you give to aspiring filmmakers and people studying film?

Make films. Don't aim for huge productions and getting to the festivals at first. Just get the camera. Even in between semesters, just get the camera, shoot some videos, and edit it. Try to make films with your cell phone because it helps too, it's like self-studying for framing and visuals, which are a huge part of cinema. You can just record your family in a family gathering. You can just follow a kid in a park and you find life in there, magic. And when you find that, you are a filmmaker.

### What is your creative process?

I usually don't have a process and I don't want to. I want to be open to different ways that come to me. But sometimes, it happens with a picture or with a feeling, and I begin to expand that or question myself, but mainly I tell the story and I use my personal experiences, or it has to be something that I somehow was involved with. Even if it's a story about a 10-year-old, it has to be about my childhood or it has to be my observation of a child that I've seen. I don't always do one way for the creative process. For *Like a Fish on the Moon*, I was fed up with the script that I was writing and rewriting and I was in a normal process. One morning, I went to see a friend and then I began to tell him a story, and I assumed that I wanted to tell him a scene, and then I figured out it was one hour I was talking. He was like, "What is that?" I was like, "It's an idea." And he said, "You have a whole script." So it was just in the back of my head for years and it was just getting to somewhere without me writing in a normal way, but it was there. And then I began to write it down.

### What is your favorite part of the process when you go to make a film?

Working with actors. Working with actors is my favorite part because I feel it is when you're bringing life to your story. It's like that you are the god and then you see the creature is getting to be alive. And for me, it's beautiful when, after lots of writing and then rehearsal, you finally have a moment that is like, oh wow, this is my character sitting there with everything, and this is it. Finally, I have it.



You were the first woman to win Transilvania IFF's Best Feature Film award for your film *Like a Fish on the Moon*. How has your identity played a role in your experience in the film industry and what can be done to expand diversity and inclusion in the industry?

Of course, it's not easy because cinema is mainly a men's industry. It's not easy as a woman to get involved in the industry because not all the people in the industry want you there. Sometimes you have to put in lots of energy to prove yourself. You

shouldn't need to waste energy on that part and prove yourself. You should just be there and do the job. It happened to me that there were lots of men working for me and as a woman director that was even younger than them, it wasn't easy for them to just get the job done. I think that is something that most of the women in this industry face, and talking about it and giving each other solutions would definitely help.

There are definitely different ways the industry can get more women involved. One of them is the way that I see it's happening in some big festivals, like Cannes and Berlin, that they want to have at least 50/50 men and women involved, which is fair, especially in a world where they don't involve women that much in this industry and the women don't get enough opportunities to be there. You see pictures of festivals and it is like a full room of men sitting there and presenting the festival as the directors or as the juries or whatever. When you ask them, "Excuse me, why you didn't invite any woman director or any film that a woman directed or any woman jurors to be a part of this?" They say, "We were looking, but we didn't see any." First, there are lots of them, but they are not getting the opportunity to be there. And secondly, there should be more funds and opportunities for these women to direct, and to be there because yes, of course, there are not as many women directors as we have men directors in the world. So you should have more women getting scholarships to be in film schools and then more women to get funds for their films and direct, and then more women to be involved in the festival. So it's like a cycle.

### What is next for you?

I recently finished the script for my next film and I'm waiting for my producer to read it. When I finish the script and we get some feedback, then I will go back to Iran to basically see how I want to shoot it there, like a pre-pre-production. And there are a lot of things and aspects that I should go and see how is it going in Iran because I'm going to shoot it in Iran, like the previous one. The story is about two sisters who are having a battle against their dictatorial father.

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

interview with

# DORNAZ HAJIHA

